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ABSTRACT

Researchers studying emerging literacy have begun building a theory of literacy development that links the processes of reading and writing. Their findings suggest that a child's emerging literacy is based on three factors: a functional expectation for print to make logical sense; an expectation of how language operates in alternate contexts; and a growing control of orthography, wordness, directionality, grapheme-phoneme correspondences, and syntax. Findings also indicate that preschool children are aware that the purpose of language is to convey meaning and that the function of reading and writing is to generate meaning. Research further indicates that young readers and writers will encounter several distinctive types of language as they begin to explore the world of print: language can be oral or written, situation-dependent or context-dependent, phrased in elaborative or restricted code styles, text or nontext. Additional findings suggest that written language (like oral language) is learned, that outcomes of one langage encounter become data for predictions in subsequent encounters, and that form follows meaning as children build their growing stock of literacy knowledge. Of importance to teachers are literacy studies indicating that young children attend initially to the meaning function of language and secondarily to formal aspects. (Tentative implications for teachers are briefly discussed.) (RH)

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EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN READING AND WRITING IN EARLY LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

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A continuing issue in the study of literacy has been the relationship between the production task of writing and the comprehension task of reading. Historically, the production tasks have often been viewed as opposite from the comprehension tasks. Wilson (1981) explains: "The two processes have often been presented as mirror images of each other. In this view, the encoder (speaker or writer) generates a deep structure (meaning) upon which the syntactic and phonological (or graphic) components operate to produce a surface structure. The decoder (listener or reader) perceives the surface structure, processes it through the phonological or graphic component, and eventually arrives at the deep structure." Because discourse production (as in writing) requires the generation of text by the language user, the direction of processing was thought to be primarily from internal to external. The act of comprehension (reading) requires the adherence of the language user to an already existing text, so the direction of processing was thought to be primarily from external to internal. However, as Bracewell (1982) states: "Recent cognitive analyses motivate a rethinking of the relationship between discourse production and comprehension tasks." He concludes that the basic task in both

discourse production and comprehension is the construction of a conceptual structure for the meaning of a particular text. Language serves as the means to display this conceptual structure. Bracewell describes comprehension and composing tasks as two extremes of a continuum. In comprehension tasks, frame information is derived from the text and must be integrated by the reader with previous knowledge to form a conceptual structure that adequately represents the message of the text. In composing tasks, frame information is derived from the writer's conceptual structure and must be translated into an externalized text capable of communicating the writer's message. Thus, the significant task common to both discourse production and comprehension is a cognitive one.

After reviewing the research on cognitive processes in both reading and writing, Crismore (1982) and Petrosky (1982), like Bracewell, conclude that both reading and writing are acts of composing. Petrosky states: "Essentially, my argument is that our comprehension of texts...is more an act of composition--for understanding is composing--than of information retrieval... There is compelling evidence to support the claim that comprehension is heavily subjective and is a function of the reader's prior knowledge, the text, and the context. I also think we can argue that we compose as we comprehend, and that our composition arises from these same factors: the text, our affective and cognitive frameworks, and the context for reading." Recent research in the cognitive aspects of reading by theorists such as Anderson (1977) Rumelhart (1980), and Schank and Abelson (1977) focuses on readers as meaning makers in reading and gives a theoretical base

for connecting reading and writing as sharing both the dependence on peoples' models of reality (or schemata) and the act of constructing meaning from words, texts, prior knowledge, and feelings. Adams and Collins (1977) conclude that one of the assumptions of schema-theoretic approaches to language comprehension is that spoken or written text does not in itself carry meaning. Rather, a text only provides direction for the listener or reader as to how he/she should construct the intended meaning from his/her own previously acquired knowledge. Schemata, also referred to by various terms such as plans, scripts, frames, world knowledge, and domain knowledge, (Anderson and Pichert, 1978; Minsky, 1975; Rumelhart and Ortony, 1977; and Schank and Abelson, 1977) are knowledge structures that provide a framework from which we view the world. Current thinking (De Beaugrande, 1981) suggests that schemata consists of categories that control our perceptions of both format and content in our reading.

Research in the development of young children's expectations for and knowledge about language and print has proven useful in determining how children develop certain schemata about reading and writing. Researchers studying emerging literacy have begun building a theory of literacy development that links the processes of reading and writing. These researchers suggest that a child's emerging literacy is based on three factors: 1. a functional expectation for print to make logical sense; 2. an expectation of how language operates in alternate contexts; and 3. a growing control of orthography, wordness, directionaltiy, grapheme-phoneme correspondences and syntax.

In their model of emergent literacy development, Harste, Burke and Carey (1981) contend that most pre-schoolers are aware that the purpose of language is to convey meaning. Using a procedure developed by Y. Goodman (1983), children were shown print in ever decreasing context, and the results indicated that children assumed the print would be meaningful. Using anecdotal records, Harste (1983) documents the importance of print expectations for both function and form in studies carried out with the writing of pre-schoolers. When Dawn, age 4, was asked to write everything she could, she began the writing assignment by forming some letters of the alphabet, but soon abandoned that in favor of scribble drawing, left-to-right, line for line down the page, thus attempting to capture on the page the flow and continuity of writing. This action was very similar to that of a four-year-old girl observed in our work with pre-schoolers who preferred scribble drawing to block letter writing, explaining that "this was how you wrote if you had something to say."

From their studies of young children's developing concepts about print, Harste, Burke, and Woodward (1979) hypothesize that the expectation of meaning in print is an essential part of the development of literacy and that comprehension is a setting for the development of written language rather than a result of it. Studies by Clay (1975), Holdaway (1983), and Y. Goodman (1983), all consistently support the idea that pre-schoolers are aware that the function of reading and writing is to generate meaning. Whether the children were reading print from some source or whether they were writing some sort of print themselves, all of the chidren

assumed that the language would make sense, and they expected others to be able to make sense out of what they had written. Thus, Harste, like Clay (1975) and Holdaway (1983), argues that growth in reading and writing is a sociopsycholinguistic process which occurs as children emulate models of reading and writing around them. The researchers also conclude that children know a great deal about written language before receiving formal reading or writing instruction.

A second major part of the model of emergent literacy suggests that children need to develop a sense of the many alternate systems in which language operates. Besides recognizing the basic idea that the function of language is meaning, another idea which must be tacitly internalized before one is literate is the recognition that language (whether it is spoken or written) is used in different ways for different purposes.

The following are descriptions of the distinctive types of language which young readers and writers will meet as they start to explore the world of print. Language can either be oral or written; it can be either situation dependent or context dependent; it can be phrased in either an elaborative or restrictive code style; or it can be text or non-text.

F. Smith (1982) makes the distinction between situation dependence and context dependent language. Situation dependent language is intimately related to the physical environment in which it is produced. Much of the everyday spoken language we hear could only be uttered in the very situation in which it

occurs if it is to be understood. Halliday (1975) gives a clear example of situation dependent language when he cites the conversation a couple has as they move furniture. Their conversation would probably make little sense to the person eavesdropping on the conversation if he did not realize the specific situation in which it occurred. Another example of situation specific language might be the conversation between a waitress and a customer at a coffee shop counter. The language and the situation are closely related, and the language makes little sense if removed from its setting. The preceding examples of situation dependent language were oral language; however, there is a type of written language that functions in the same situation dependent way. This is the language of "signs" or "labels" which appears in our environment. Much of the world around us is an ocean of print that is entirely dependent on the context in which it occurs. This is the world of print that children see in the grocery store on in commercials on television, and it is probably one of their first sources of knowledge about print. That children recognize these labels as meaningful uses of print very early in life has been established by Goodman (1983). In contrast to situation specific language which cannot be understood outside the immediate context, context based language can be understood without reference to any type of communication outside the discourse itself. Context based language makes sense independent of the situation in which it is read. Various linguistic constraints are used to make what is implicitly obvious in the situation explicitly obvious in the selection.

Halliday (1975) notes this distinction between situation based and context based language when he defines the concept of text. A text is an internally consistent body of writing or speech which is interpretable without reference to any communication outside the discourse itself, and which is unified by categorization and cohesive ties. Texts, then, such as formal speech or books, are always written using context based language and function very differently from the situation based language of conversation.

Describing another language form with which children will have to cope, Bernstein (1962) makes the distinction between restrictive code language and elaborative code language. Restrictive code language is used primarily for social conversational purposes and is restricted to relatively simple verbalizations. In contrast to restrictive code language, elaborative code language is stated in more formal, unambiguous, and specific terms, and uses a greater range of concepts, vocabulary, structural elements, and information load. Thus, for young children, part of becoming literate involves learning how to deal with the generally elaborative code nature of context dependent language.

In the detailed analyses of school children's writing in the United Kingdom (Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, and Rosen, 1975), the investigators note the ceaseless demand for information writing at school. Rosen and Rosen (1973) point out the great contrast between the situation dependent restrictive prose most children have developed before formal schooling and the complex elaborative code of informational text which they are required to deal with in school.

In research with young children,Harste (1983), Graves (1975), and Kurth (1982), found that as young writers develop, they learn to use the more context dependent forms of language. When children first begin writing, their writing is often situation dependent and they explain their text as they write or 'draw' it. However, after exposure to context dependent language, they begin to use some of the features of context dependent language in their written products. For example, in one instance when she was describing a chair as "over there", a six-year-old decided that she would need to say "The chair was by the school door," thus making the sentence more context than situation dependent. In their extensive longitudinal study of children's writing ability, King and Rentel (1983) found that if children are consistently encouraged to and given opportunity to produce stories, they can develop significant control over textual relationships that contribute strongly to coherent writing.

Also related to the idea of varying language contexts is the idea of varying content formats and text types. Children writing texts were found to be able to develop some notions about content format. Many children developed the idea of the form for letter writing early in their writing and also were able to use horizontal listing, which some children were able to produce a narrative text. There were also some children who could recognize a basic narrative pattern, but who could not produce it.

The third feature of the emerging literacy model is that children exhibit a growing control of orthography, wordness, directionality, and grapheme phoneme relationships and syntax. Studies of children's "scribbles" or first writing attempts have

shown that children explore writing-like behavior which they have seen modeled.

In his study of pre-school children, Holdaway (1979) notes that preschool children explore writing-like behavior in much the same way that they emulate reading behavior. Durkin's classic study (1966) of early readers found that children who read early often were "paper and pencil kids," and, like successful beginning readers studied by Clay (1975) used quantities of print in reading-like and writing-like ways. Wilson, (1982) underscores the imitative nature of children's scribbles by showing writing samples taken by Harste and Carey (1979) from three four-year-old children, one each from the United State, Egypt, and Saude Arabia. Each child's "writing" reflects the type of script used in his/her culture. Children can relate to a print environment if it is provided for them, and, generally they are willing to actively explore this print environment by attempting their own writing tasks.

In her study of Australian children's early print awareness, Clay (1975) found that as children become more aware of the form of writing, their responses to print become more directly related to the graphic information. She also found that children gradually develop a perceptual awareness of the written symbol system, and when learning to write make over-generalizations or gross approximations in their writing using weird letter forms, invented words and make believe sentences. This phenomena of invented spelling was also explored by C. Chomsky (1971) who described the rule-governed, systematic, and logical behaviors demonstrated by

young children in their early writing. She also contended that writing develops before reading rather than reading before writing. In studies of children's invented spellings, Read (1970) noted that all of the spontaneous spellers in the sample learned to read with little formal instruction and that most of the children learned to spell before reading, and a few others coincidentally with reading. Similarly, Clay (1975) reports that spelling ability is the best indicator of beginning reading skill. Heald-Taylor (1982) gives details on invented spelling and suggests ten stages a child passes through on the way from scribbles to invented spelling to 'normal' writing. These ten stages include: 1. uses uninterrupted scribble; 2. uses spaced scribble; 3. uses known letters and symbols as well as scribble; 4. uses letters which correspond to sound symbols 5. writes known words; 6. uses initial and final consonants and invented spellings; 7. overuses punctuation and grammar skills; 8. begins to self-correct invented spellings; 9. writes stories with imagination and quotations; and 10. writes for a variety of purposes, and uses a variety of sources for interesting language.

The findings from these studies in emergent literacy strongly suggest that written language, like oral language, is learned and that what is learned from one language encounter becomes data for further predictions in other encounters, and that form follows meaning as children build their growing stock of literacy knowledge. It is interesting to note that when children first begin to read and write they are very willing to sacrifice form for content and will use only as much of the form as they can manage in their representation of print. This willingness to simplify

the form of language into manageable units shows a very sensible simplification approach to the complex problem of language production.

On the basis of data from the studies of emergent literacy, Wilson (1982) concludes that whether reading or writing is presented first in the classroom, it is clear that one has a positive influence on the other and that both processes develop as a natural extension of children's desire to generate meaning. In the cases studied in the emergent literacy data, the form was subordinate to the meaning function, and only after function was clearly internalized did children begin to devote considerable attention to form.

In investigations of older students, this tendency to allow meaning to pre-empt correct form was not found. Bruce (1982) comments that much of the difficulty of writing stems from the large number of constraints that must be satisfied at the same time. In expressing the idea that a writer must consider over all text structure, paragraph structure, sentence structure, and word structure, Scardamalia (1981) has described some of the difficulties that children have in expressing higher order relationships between parts of texts. This difficulty occurs because they have concentrated on lower and local levels of task production such as sentences, words, and letters, and while concentrating on the lower levels of task production lose sight of the high level relationships which they had wished to show. This process of being pulled into lower and more local levels of task production is known as down-sliding. Children's propensity to down-slide in

writing is a very common problem which has been noted in the composition research on revision techniques. When using a word processor with children, Kirlund (1983) found that the subjects did extensive local revision, but very little global revision. Beach (1976) found that when students were asked to revise, they were often more concerned with features of correctness than they were with the larger organizational aspects of their compositions. Beach concluded that this concern for correctness at a lower level hampered global revision. In a similar vein, Perl (1979) found that the remedial writers she studied were, at times, almost paralyzed in their efforts to move forward in writing because of their concern for correctness. These writers never developed the fluency and concern for audience and purpose which characterize proficient writers. Dietrich (1966) and Rogers (1970) speculate that this tendency to concentrate on the correctness of lower level tasks may be fostered by teachers themselves because in two separate studies they found that often teachers focus on errors in their evaluation of papers to the exclusion of other factors such as organization and content.

Because there are still many unexplored relationships between reading and writing, any implications for teaching need to be given cautiously. However, one of the implications from the research in emergent literacy is that teachers need to remember that meaning is the function of language, and that meaning must alwyas be central in the teacher's instructional perspective. It is true that one of the teacher's tasks is to help children learn the conventional forms of writing, but teachers need to remember

that the meaning funcion of language needs to be emphasized while children are learning its forms.

There is much evidence to suggest that children's knowledge of how language works develops through their attempts to approximate written communication. Therefore, it is obvious that children need to be given many opportunities to write and to get feedback about their writing. But because the development of literacy does not result from writing alone, but from the interaction between reading and writing, children need to be surrounded by a print-filled environment and must have many chances to read and be read to from a variety of types of materials. Only by observing the written language of others can children obtain the necessary data to generate their own hypotheses about how the language works.

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